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SUBJECT: Georgia's Woman of Courage Nominee 2008

REFERENCE: STATE 126072

¶1. Post's nominee for the International Woman of Courage Award is Marina Tabukushvili, artist, civil society activist, and chairman of the Georgian NGO TASO. Nominee is willing to be considered for the award and agrees if selected to travel to Washington DC. Biographical data requested in reftel is below.

¶1A. Full Name: Marina (No Middle Name) Tabukushvili

¶1B. Job Title: General Director, TASO Foundation

C: Date of Birth: August 22, 1951

D: Country of Birth: Georgia

E: Citizenship: Georgian

F: Telephone: (995 32) 92 05 95

G: Address: 15 Rezo Tabukushvili St, Tbilisi 0108

H: Email: marina@taso.org.ge

I: Passport Number: GEO 05AB24937

The Person and Her Role

¶2. Tabukushvili has been a powerful advocate for women's issues within the Caucasus region for more than 15 years. She began work with the Soros Foundation Open Society Program more than 10 years ago, addressing principally women's and children's issues, which led to her current affiliation with the Anti-Violence Network. In 2007, she established her own NGO to research and record women's oral histories throughout the former Soviet space. The purpose of the project is to decrease the gap between ethnic and religious minorities and Georgian majority by listening to what women belonging to different ethnic and religious classes have to say. The project aims to deconstruct the "otherness" of these women through understanding their humanness, pain and joy. Tabukushvili has improved the lives of Caucasian women, not just Georgian women, by addressing culturally cross-cutting issues such as trafficking, domestic violence and the gap between ethnic and religious minorities and the Georgian majority. Her role has been one of researcher, activist, and enabler, cementing consensus among private and government entities to yield concrete and measurable results on these non-negotiable demands of human dignity. Resolving many of these issues, especially domestic violence, has been exceedingly difficult, due to a strong sense of honor and shame that has made decision makers reluctant to recognize it in a public forum.

Combating Domestic Violence

¶3. Tabukushvili was one of five Georgian activists trained on family violence and child abuse at the Open Society Institute in Budapest in 2000. She returned home resolute to address both issues. She uses a multilateral approach to bring an end to domestic violence through formulating legislation, heightening public awareness, training judges and police and addressing the practical issues of housing and referring victims.

How She Gets Results

14. As an implementer for the Soros Foundation, Tabukushvili was a force multiplier in bringing practical experience to the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) draft legislation to combat trafficking and address domestic violence, and now in fulfilling the stipulations of the Anti-Domestic Violence Action-Plan. Tabukushvili increases public awareness of women's issues by networking with women journalists, promoting publication of women's and children's rights' cases and coordinating closely with the Ombudsman's Office to investigate and resolve documented violations. She has been instrumental in bringing experts from the Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights to train family court judges from Georgia's remote regions, where domestic violence cases are more frequent. She was one of the first to recognize the value of training police in how to respond to family domestic calls, arranging for some of the first ever workshops to address this deficiency. Tabukushvili played a large role in creating the Anti-Violence Network in each of the ten regions of Georgia, informally building a savvy nexus of professionals who understand and give meaningful assistance to victims. Together with Nato Shavladkadze, she sought and gained funding through international organizations to establish the first and still the only women's shelter in Tbilisi in 2004. Tabukushvili is a positive example of an ordinary citizen who takes on controversial and often unpopular issues but addresses them in an effective way so that its affect reverberates through all levels of society.

15. Political Officer Joye Davis-Kirchner is post's point of contact. Her contact information is (995) 32 277620, Davis-KirchnerJL@state.gov.
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